

Changing news genres as a result of global technological developments

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TITLE: NEW NEWS GENRES

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NEW NEWS GENRES

Abstract

Based on research carried out over a two year period amongst small groups of students from the UK, France, US and Russia, this article explores how churnalism is not only having an impact on what people read but also on how they read it, with far reaching consequences for what has traditionally been perceived as the news genre. By drawing on the understanding of genre as a social action (Miller 1984), we explore the ways in which churnalism is changing news consumption. New news genres are appearing in response to new social interactions that users repeatedly act out predominantly online. As users, we produce and consume texts which we refer to as 'news' in multiple situations which can, in turn, be sorted into patterns. Our comparative analysis offers surprising insights into how these patterns form new news genres, which are characteristic of social media (many-to-many) instead of mass media (one-to-many) (Castells 2001). Genres can be and should be studied not only through textual analysis but also through the prism of social reality and recurrent social actions (Lomborg 2011), particularly now that users, rather than journalists, are taking a dominant role in identifying what constitutes news genres. Our perception of what constitutes news is determined by the changing ways in which we consume news.

Keywords

Churnalism; genre; journalism; media; news; reception

Introduction: Changing News Genres as a Result of Global Technological Developments

Churnalism has come to define a passive process of reproduction of the news across multiple media platforms and the consequences of this process have had far reaching effects on how readers receive the news. In this article, we suggest that one of the most significant and unexplored aspects of churnalism is its reception and the consequences this holds for the way consumers navigate, interpret and interact with the news that is now available to them. The results of our small scale qualitative cross-cultural study suggest that far from effecting a *passive* mode of reception, churnalism has given rise to multiple *active* ways of reading the news. These ways of reading have given rise to patterns of consumption that can be grouped and identified; patterns of consumption that have, in turn, given rise to new news genres. Our study further shows that news consumers' 'genre repertoires', or "the sets of genres that are routinely enacted by the members of a community" to get news, have changed since the advent of social media and churnalism (Orlikowski and Yates, 1994, 542).

In this paper, we seek to move away from the focus upon churnalism as a product to thinking about churnalism as a process of reception and to study emerging genre repertoires of young news consumers. Based on research carried out over a period of two years amongst groups of students in the UK, France, USA and Russia, this article will explore some of the changes in news consumption that churnalism has wrought by examining *what* news users are consuming and *how*, *i.e.* in what media, genres and languages. Conscious of the pitfalls of empirical research into media audiences, our methodological approach attempts to take into account the complex specificities of the reception process, with attention to the age, gender and educational background of our respondents. The insights of our study are particularly interesting

given the diversity of reception contexts, across four countries with varying degrees of internet penetration. Of the four countries involved, the UK has the highest internet penetration at 92.6%, followed by the USA at 88.5%, France at 86.4% and, finally, Russia at 71.3%.¹ The four countries also represent different media systems: three countries have free mass media and free internet (the UK, USA, and France) and one country with government controlled mass media and 'not free' internet (Russia).² The purpose of this study is to shed light on emerging cross-cultural habits of news consumption in diverse media landscapes and to examine whether there are differences in the way news is consumed depending on the level of media freedom.

By drawing on the understanding of genre as a social act (Miller 1984), when technological affordances change from providing the conditions from one-to-many-communication to many-to-many (self)communication (Castells 2001), we will explore the ways in which churnalism is changing news consumption habits. If churnalism originally referred to content production and distribution (Nick Davies, 2008), it has now come to implicate the very definition of what constitutes news: the way in which we consume news is changing what we perceive to be news. Liberated from traditional hierarchical systems of production and distribution, media legacy gatekeepers no longer determine how and where consumers receive their news. New news genres are appearing in response to new social interactions that users repeatedly act out predominantly online, in social media. As users, we produce and consume texts which we refer to as 'news' in multiple situations which can, in turn, be sorted into patterns. Our cross-cultural comparative analysis offers surprising insights into how these patterns form new news genres, which are characteristic of social media (many-to-many) instead of mass media (one-to-many). Certain genres evolve from or appear to re-mediate 'old' media genres, such as news articles, interviews, opinion, etc. These have previously been described as 'extant subgenres', a "class of cybergenres in which the new genre emerges directly from a "genre existing in other media. [...] These genres clearly 'migrated' to the electronic medium" (Shepherd and Watters, 1998, 2). There are also cybergenres that bear "a 'chromosomal imprint' of an antecedent genre in another medium, but demonstrating significant change warranting identification as a new genre" (Shepherd and Watters, 1998). Finally, there are new — or 'spontaneous' — media genres that are emerging, including but not confined to Tweets, alerts to newly published articles via a mobile device, Instagram images, Facebook updates. Spontaneous genre is "a cybergenre that has never existed in other media; a novel genre that arises with no clear antecedent genres in non-electronic form" (Shepherd and Watters, 1998).

The above definitions of cybergenres are based on the multimodal characteristics of groups of cyber-texts. Genres, however, can and should be studied not only through textual analysis but also, or more so, through the prism of social reality and recurrent social actions (Lomborg 2011), particularly now that users, rather than journalists, are taking a dominant role in identifying what constitutes news genres. A number of recent studies have focused on the emergence, as opposed to the evolution,

¹ The figures are taken from Internet Live Stats, available at <http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users-by-country/>.

² Freedom House considered Russian internet to be 'partly free' before 2014. However, since 2015 Russian internet has been assessed as 'not free' and remains as such now (for further info, see <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2015/russia>).

of new genres. It is important to note that new genres emerge in specific economic, technological and ideological conditions. Media technologies and the affordances of media platforms shape and inform our online behaviour; behaviour that is repetitive and therefore habit forming. Miller and Shepherd (2009) note that discerning new genres on the Internet can be related in part to the way the new technological affordances interact with an exigence; in other words, with an identified need. In addition, they point out that patterns of repetition and recurrence create a new decorum that has both extrinsic features (audience, tradition, and material conditions) and intrinsic features (the relation of substance, form, and style) (2009, 285–286). However, this does not imply that the need pre-exists the technology, new genres emerge because, as Østergaard and Bundgaard (2015) observe, technological innovation makes it possible to articulate that need and thereby develop the genre. If, *pace* Miller, we consider genre to function as a form of social recognition that helps account for the ways we “encounter, interpret, react to and create particular texts” (Miller, 1984, 151), this moves us away from thinking about genre as a textual phenomenon towards thinking about genre as determined as much by pragmatic as by semantic or syntactic attributes (Altman, 1999). The pragmatic dimension reaches beyond the text and inscribes production and reception in their contexts of use. In treating genre as a form of social recognition, we further consider it to be a pact or tacit contract or a conventional relation between producer, text and receiver that ensures a mutual understanding in the communication process (Neale, 1980, 19).

If genre exists as a recognizable contract between producer and consumer/user, establishing the genre of texts in communication with each other and others, the interactivity and UGC of Web 2.0 means that users are playing an ever greater role in determining genre. As Lomborg argues, an inherent property of the social media environment is that genres become increasingly unstable, ambiguous and dynamic. She states that “genre analysis must put a stronger focus on how users negotiate genres like blogs, social network sites, chat forums, text-messages, microblogs and location-based communication services – in and through social (inter)action as framed by networked media such as the Internet and the mobile phone” (2014, 65). In such a framework, consumers’ definition of the news is now more likely to result from the question “What’s new?” than “What’s the news?” In this new dynamic and unstable communicative environment, our study addresses the question of what form the new news genres take.

Before the advent of Web 2.0, news was defined by its means of production and distribution via traditional news outlets: newspapers, magazines, radio and television. Today, communication technologies continue to expand digitally and exponentially. Today’s news is visual, aural, textual and hypertextual. Churnalism has contributed to the omnipresence of news: it is available all the time, on demand, and from any number of sources, from the professional journalist to the amateur blogger, Youtuber or Tweeter. Hence to study emerging news genres, we focused on people’s patterns of news consumption instead of the textual analysis of news items themselves. Only by analysing when, how and through which channels members of the public access news, and what they perceive to be news, can we identify emerging news genres; genres that result from recent technological advances including the advent of social media, the mass production and distribution of accessible smart phones and tablets.

Methodology

In our study, we focus on college students between the ages of 18 and 24 in Russia, the UK, France and the US. This age group has been identified as belonging to the millennial generation (born between 1982 and 1998) that follows generation X (Howe & Strauss, 1991) and has distinct characteristics. Millennials are known for relying on the internet and social media for their news consumption (Taibi, 2013), unlike previous generations. The MEDIA Insight Project (2015) divided younger millennials into the “unattached” (those who stumble into news or use it for social and entertainment purposes) and “explorers” (those who actively seek out news and engage with it). Their news consumption helps us to identify new trends, patterns and news genres in these different countries at different stages of internet penetration.

For the first pilot study of news consumption in February 2015, the weekly news diary was chosen as the optimal methodology as it allowed for participants to consciously record the news items that they came across on daily basis.³ The word ‘consciously’ is key here because participants had to identify a media item as a piece of news for themselves, i.e. not to simply list all the mass media sources that they looked at. Giving respondents this opportunity helped us to identify a number of new genres that students referred to as vehicles for news, including Facebook updates, YouTube videos, tweets, online chats and others, which will be covered in the discussion section of the article. News diaries were sent out to small gender-mixed groups of ten to twenty students at Moscow State University (Russia), Perm State University (Russia), the American University of Paris (France) and the University of Birmingham (the UK). Students were majoring in a variety of subjects (journalism in Moscow, local government and politics in Perm, modern languages in Birmingham, media in Paris and a cross-disciplinary selection in Philadelphia) as it was not our purpose to conduct a comparative study of students of one specialisation only. In the discussion of our results, we make allowance for differences in the professional interests of participants.

In Russia, two cities were chosen in order to compare students from the metropolitan centre with those in the province, as internet penetration varies considerably in different parts of a country with eleven time zones. Birmingham students’ news consumption would be comparable with that of Perm students, as both are large cities away from the capital centre, with similar populations of about one million people. This would allow us to compare news consumption trends in a developed country with free media and a BRIC country with government-controlled mass media. A sample of international students in Paris would be compared with a group of international students in Birmingham to see whether international bi/multi-lingual students have different news consumption trends from monolingual students who study in their own country. Both the American University in Paris and the University of Birmingham have large cohorts of international students. The respondents completed the news diaries either as class assignments, where the courses lent themselves, or as volunteers. The diaries gave information about what time respondents accessed the news, how they accessed the news, what they read and whether they followed the news item up through site referral or other sources. In some

³ Rulyova has previously used diaries to study television consumption among different social groups in Russia while working on the AHRC-funded project Television Culture in Russia led by Prof. S. Hutchings in 2004-2007. The format of media diaries was helpful to understand when, where and how Russians watched TV. The results of that study were published in Hutchings and Rulyova (2009).

circumstances, the students were asked to write short reflections on their experience of filling in the diary.

In February 2016, the second round of our news consumption study took place in similar groups at the University of Perm, the University of Moscow and the University of Birmingham. However, the student group at the American University of Paris was replaced with a similar sized group at Temple University in Philadelphia, the USA. In addition, the news diaries were followed by discussion in focus groups with students at the University of Perm in Russia. Focus groups were added as an extra tool to gather answers to some emerging questions from the 2016 news diaries, as the project leader Dr Rulyova was awarded Marie Curie funding to visit the city of Perm on a scholars' exchange programme. In December 2016, three focus groups at Perm University, Russia, were made up of a group of future journalists and politics students (aged between 19 and 22); a group of local government and politics students (aged between 19 and 22); and a group of graduate students on further education courses (aged between 25 and 30). These groups allowed us to look for further regional and national particularities of news consumption, while also addressing an older age group to see if trends were confirmed. These in-depth discussions reinforced and deepened the findings of the news diaries, while allowing for interesting cross-cultural comparison. The groups responded to questions concerning where, when and what sort of news they consumed. Unfortunately, due to a lack of further funding it was not possible to organise focus groups in the other cities where news diaries were kept by students.

Discussion of the Results

Despite cultural, political, social, professional and gender differences as well as differences in media landscapes, the diaries demonstrated striking similarities across national borders. Around 95-97% of all students accessed news every day at irregular intervals, dominated by peaks in morning between 8am and 12pm and in the evening between 5pm and 9pm. Regional differences emerged between American students who accessed news in the morning and afternoon, and Russian students whose news consumption peaked in the evening. In terms of weekly consumption, the least activity took place over the weekend with maximum consumption on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. All respondents relied on internet-enabled media (from 75% in Perm to 95% in Birmingham, UK) and specifically on social media as their primary news source (from 70% in Perm to 90% in Paris and Birmingham). Facebook and its national equivalents (VKontakte in Russia) are the most popular media for news consumption: 30% of Philadelphia students accessed FB in search of news in the first instance, 80% of students in Perm accessed news via VKontakte and another 10% via Facebook; 70% of UK students accessed news via Facebook; 70% of Moscow students reached for the news via VKontakte and 5% of them via Facebook⁴. Among other popular news sources are Twitter, Instagram, search engines such as Google and Yandex (in Russia), apps,

⁴ From students' reflections and focus group discussion, we gathered that VKontakte is considered less formal than Facebook in Russia, as one Moscow student described the two: "Facebook is like wearing high heels to work, while using VKontakte is like wearing slippers".

websites of mass media sources and increasingly YouTube channels.⁵ YouTube was mentioned by many students as a source of various news items, especially specific news relating to people's hobbies, professions and personal interests, for example, a young woman who works as an organizer of children's parties in Perm used YouTube as the main resource to keep her up to date with global developments in the world of children's entertainment. Twitter is much less popular (only about 15% of those who took part in focus groups said they used Twitter) and is used mostly by those who are more interested in following through the use of hashtags, particular types of news or stories, or certain individuals.

A slightly higher number of Russian students over their western counterparts watched news on television. This can be partially explained by the fact that many Russian students continue to live with their parents. Their news consumption via TV is mostly passive, as they watch it within a family context where parents or grandparents determine the viewing. Indeed, Russian students associate TV viewing as a practice belonging to older generations. Focus group discussion revealed that they perceive their grandparents to be the victims of government propaganda: one Perm student remarked that if one needed to know what the official line was on a particular political issue, one should ask a granny, whom the TV will have informed.

Elsewhere TV viewing continued as a form of news consumption but was markedly less popular. For example, one UK student watched BBC news in the morning with her roommate as they had breakfast. Apart from occasional news programmes on TV, students do not choose live TV as their preferred medium but rather access television websites, especially the BBC, the RT, Al-Jazeera, Channel One in Russia, CNN, ABC, CBS, Fox News and ESPN for sport in the US. Radio features as a rare source of news too, though more frequent than the printed press. Students tend to listen to music interrupted by weather and brief news reports on the radio. Not a single student across the countries involved in the study purchased a newspaper to read the news. On few occasions, they bumped into a newspaper: stopped at a newspaper stand in a shop (once in Birmingham), picked up a free newspaper (in Moscow and Paris), read a university newspaper (in Perm). Most of them read free newspapers online or via an app on their smart phone. Most Russian students have some news applications on their devices whether they are apps on smart phones or news updates through social media. For Moscow students, the top five news sources were Kommersant, Medusa, Izvestia, Interfax and Ria Novosti. Students in Philadelphia check news websites, such as Huffington Post, New York Times, 6ABC, receive news via news apps including CNN and the Wall Street Journal. Some also read blogs, including theSkimm and Reddit. One student wrote in her reflection: Tuesday, 7PM: "I get my daily notifications from my Wall Street Journal, NY Times, and Guardian apps. I briefly read each headline, but do not click on the actual article links. I like this way of being aware of what's going on in the world in a fast way." The students further qualified as news sources emails and telephone calls. In all countries students mentioned 'word-of-mouth' as a source of news (from US parents to students in Paris, from lecturers to students in Perm, Moscow, and Philadelphia) but these were insignificant in comparison with the amount of news consumed online.

The results obtained both from news diaries and focus group discussion allow us

⁵ Since the numbers of respondents were relatively small, most of our analysis is qualitative but is supported with quantitative data where possible.

to conclude that the majority of news consumption takes place online and mostly on smartphones and mobile devices. This corresponds with the findings from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism in 2016, where 51% of those surveyed across 26 countries reported using social media as a source of news each week, with 28% of 18-24 year olds citing it as their main source of news. This confirms Reuters' previous findings showing that desktop use for news consumption continues to fall and that social networks are the most accessed source for news. The strongest growth in this field is seen amongst the 18-24 age group. Global trends show that social media continues to grow as a channel for news discovery, with Facebook the most popular social network for news consumption. Respondents were quick to acknowledge the change in their news consumption habits from other generations. Many of them emphasized the convenience of social media: "Right after I wake up, I access Facebook, Instagram and one news website. In five minutes, I have already read posts on Facebook which normally contain links to articles and videos and news headlines in the website. This is the most convenient and practical way to become updated of the main happenings and the one that fits best into my busy schedule." (Female international student, trilingual, 22 years old, American University of Paris.)

The analysis of the content of news items and students' engagement with this content demonstrates several new trends in news consumption in comparison with previous generations. The first trend is the **anti-hierarchical practice** of news consumption, which is strongly linked to the increasingly dominant role of the news consumer in what they choose to read and watch and in what order, whether it is online or offline, as the individual scans through information. Our findings confirm that today's young news consumers distinguish but do not prioritize hard news over soft, political over personal. There are many examples of this practice across all four countries. For example, a US student who received notifications at 8.30am from the Wall Street Journal, The New York Times and The Guardian (air strikes in Syria, Grammy Awards), then received at 12.55 a photo of a new puppy from a friend on FB: all these items are listed as news of equal significance. During the conflict in Ukraine and the Ebola crisis, American University students encountered and followed up news such as rumours of a tiger on the loose in Paris, man in wheelchair stands for first dance, film trailers, celebrities' pregnancies and restaurant recommendations. Stories such as those concerning Russia's nuclear arsenal were read by the students with as close attention as stories about pedestrians' stopping road traffic to allow ducks to cross.

The second trend is a growing consumption of **multimodal** news items via Instagram, Google, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and other web-based platforms, which is only to be expected 'in an age [...] where multimodality is moving into the centre of practical communicative action' (Kress and Theo van Leeuwen 2001, p. 2). As far as the news consumption is concerned, there is a greater emphasis on the visual due to the many technological affordances for visual recording and distribution. Photographs have, for example, come to play a more prominent role in delivering news and bringing an emotional dimension to hard news stories. In news consumption, images which 'encode emotion' (Kress and Theo van Leeuwen 2001, p. 2) have become widespread unlike music, which 'encodes action' (p. 2). Like static images, video is an increasingly popular news genre. Students in all countries clicked on video links that they received either by Facebook or email. In focus group discussion in Perm, students repeatedly underlined the increasing value of Youtube channels in providing specialised news.

The third trend highlights the **changing role of the news consumer**. Observing the changes to learning process in the new media environment where 'information "of

value” comes from many sources’, Kress and Selander argue that ‘the ways to “learn” new things differ a lot from the experiences of older generations’ and requires people to ‘become designers’ and ‘to take a greater responsibility for their own learning’ by becoming ‘designers of their own learning practices’ (Gunther Kress, Staffan Selander 2012). We have noticed related tendencies in news consumption. Internet users are now designers of their own news consumption, whether active or passive. The spectrum from ‘active to passive’ is large as the individual determines their level of interaction with the news. Overall, respondents perceived themselves to be active news consumers: “People do not wait for the news to come to them through the newspaper or the TV, instead they go after the news.” (Female international student, trilingual, 22 years old, American University of Paris.) If it could be argued that we have always ‘bumped into’ news through snippets of conversation, gossip, half-heard public broadcasts, our research reveals that the way in which our respondents encountered the news was neither passive or random. Respondents actively navigated and made choices about which sources in their social media feeds they considered to be reliable, and they took other steps of participating in news as well, including posting news stories, commenting on them, liking and forwarding them. News consumers in all countries demonstrated much wariness and suspicion when it came to trusting news they ‘bumped into’ on Facebook: “One has to be extra careful on the Internet because anyone can publish anything they like. It makes it harder with so many opinions to always try and find out what is the real truth.” (Female international student, 18 years old, American University of Paris)

When respondents did dig deeper into a story, the most important qualities that made a destination useful were that they knew the source well. When students encountered a news story that piqued their interest, they almost always followed it up through site referral. This appears to fly in the face of recent findings concerning the consumption of fake news, although the largest study so far carried out into fake news involved younger news consumers, pre-teens and teens⁶. This suspicion of sources amongst our respondents was accompanied by their heightened awareness of the algorithmic nature of social media news feeds. News stories encountered by students reflected their personal interests and this came as no surprise: “What appears on my feed is also subject to what my friends’ post, like or share and as my friends are more concerned with what Kim Kardashian is wearing than any major political event, I would say that my news is incredibly filtered.” (Female international student, 20 years old, American University of Paris.) Students demonstrated an awareness of the role algorithms play in filtering news but expressed no resentment of the system. This again confirms the conclusions drawn by Reuters (2016), who stated: “We find strong concerns that personalized news and more algorithmic selection of news will mean missing out on important information or challenging viewpoints. Having said that, we find that young people are more comfortable with algorithms than with editors.” Here we should note that as the surveys were carried out before the 2016 American presidential election with its resulting media focus on echo chambers⁷ and filter bubbles, respondents at the time were more concentrated on the pleasures of filtered

⁶ Stanford University Study, Nov. 2016, found that 82% of middle-schoolers of a sample survey of 7,804, could not distinguish fake news from real.

⁷ The term echo chamber refers to ideological segregation on the Internet via social media, reducing the diversity of opinions and views users are exposed to (Sunstein, 2009).

news than its drawbacks.

Regional differences were revealed in students' concerns. If western students are aware of the algorithmic selection of news by social media platforms and, especially of the fact that commercial companies take advantage of their consumption habits, Russian students and, particularly politics students, are acutely aware of the electronic footprint or digital shadow their online habits create and showed a tendency to use alternative or secure browsers to search for news items that could be potentially compromising ("dangerous"). In focus group discussion, they offered examples of a small number of local people who had been contacted by national security agents after having performed online searches related to oppositional political activities. Students were suspicious of the technical problems that arise on VKontakte: sometimes the platform would not open, for example. Students suspected that these technical problems are likely to be caused by those who 'clean' VKontakte pages of politically compromising material. Russian students who claimed to be able to "see through" or "sense" national propaganda (mainly politics students) actively engaged with the news by trying to test its veracity. Other students explained their apathy towards and lack of interest in federal and international news as resulting from what they perceived to be the high levels of federal propaganda. Among the most active news consumers were two students of local government in Perm who used online chat services to check the information received from the government-funded media sources about the conflict in Ukraine. They contacted Ukrainians living in eastern Ukraine to ask them questions about the situation there and check the veracity of mass media messages. In this case, the online chat is used as a vehicle for news, and could be identified as a novel, hybrid and collaborative news genre, i.e. a genre "requiring communicative interaction between users, often with some kind of multimedia communication technology" (Yates, Orlikowski and Rennecker, 1997).

Another example of the type of an active news consumer is a UK modern languages student who tended to check all the international news items about the conflicts in Ukraine and in Syria for veracity by accessing news via the British BBC, the RT, Russian Channel One and Sky News. Such cross-checking was done mostly by individuals who could access news in more than one language. However, being bi- or multi-lingual does not make one an active news consumer but allows for extra tools to become one, as the individual must also have personal (immigrants), political (students of politics) or professional (students of modern languages) interests to engage with the media in a second or third language. Among such active news consumers were an English bilingual male Joint Honours student and a trilingual female Spanish student, majoring in Modern Languages and Politics. Some less integrated international students such as Chinese students in the US or the US students in Paris engaged mostly with home news sources. Interestingly, our expectation that we would encounter forms of citizen journalism was not met. Only a couple of students in Perm spoke of the creation of online content via blogs and Instagram during focus group discussion. Both blogs were mostly for entertainment. Certain journalism students in Moscow were already actively involved in the creation of news content but this, however, falls within the remit of professional rather than citizen activity.

Our findings concur with the conclusions drawn by the Media Insight Project that news consumers can be divided into 'explorers' and 'the unattached' (2015). We would argue that the new media landscape, flooded with churnalism, provides more opportunities for active news consumers. For example, Russian students who use online chat rooms to check news for veracity, or UK students who search actively for

alternative points of view by reading or watching news on BBC, Channel One Russia, and Sky News and other platforms. Active users demonstrate a high level of awareness of their electronic footprint and its potential political (and other) consequences. For example, Russian students are concerned about the political consequences of searching for, and expressing, alternative political views online. At the other end of the spectrum, there are passive news consumers who are not motivated to engage with news and are therefore more vulnerable to fake news, propaganda, and advertising. The new media age puts more demands on news consumers who must actively engage with news because a failure to do so leads to a lack of critical distance. The digital divide between news consumers is no longer confined to those equipped with the educational tools to decode what they consume but also exists at the level of voluntary engagement.

A recognised trend in media consumption is **segmentation of users by general interest** (such as politics, culture, health), hobby (sports, music, fashion), social media grouping, language, place of residence, etc. In countries where there are national and/or local equivalents of Facebook, there is further user segmentation in that Facebook is used for more formal and work-related connections, while the national equivalent VKontakte is used for personal online socializing. Professionalization of the news is also related to education and learning, which were equated with news by many students, especially in Philadelphia where of all websites visited by students, 22% were checked for learning purposes. For example, the news diary of a trilingual female student in Philadelphia who was born in India and is majoring in psychology and neuroscience almost completely consisted of news of medicine, psychology and neuroscience: Monday 9:30AM: "Read and got general concepts for some Psychology topics in Memory on Wikipedia to prepare the research draft due on this Friday." 10:15 AM: "Googled topic "False memory syndrome" (FMS). Clicked on one result. main website of FMS foundation." 10:30 AM: "Searched key word "False memory syndrome" on www.jstor.org Found many relevant articles." Among other websites visited by students for learning purposes are Wikipedia, TED Talks, Google, Library Databases. The professional identities of Perm students were also confirmed and defined through news consumption with politics students referring to news sources as Ostraya Politika (Hot Politics) and Politika Segodnya (Politics Today).

From our results, it appears that **linguistic segmentation** has more impenetrable borders than other types of segmentation. For example, our findings confirm that the majority of users in all countries read and watch news in their native languages apart from bi- or multilingual news consumers, who were international students studying in another country: Spanish, Portuguese and Kurdish students in Birmingham, Chinese students in Moscow and Philadelphia, American students in Paris. The news consumption of most international students is multilingual and involves news items in their mother-tongue and the language of the country where they study, and sometimes another language. For example, all four Spanish female students in Birmingham were regularly linked to Spanish networks of friends via Facebook and read news about Spain, the European Union (migrant crisis), local news in Madrid. At the same time, they also regularly followed BBC news and other English-language news sources. One of them also accessed news in Russian, as it was part of her joint BA degree. Very few of the Russian respondents consumed news in languages other than Russian. Those students who had done so, explained that it was at the request of tutors at the university to explore international news stories or to improve their English-Language skills. Overall, they all read and watched news in Russian. One or two noted that they translated small parts of news using electronic translators on Yandex.

Localisation and hyper-localisation of news is another trend that has been observed in students' news consumption. It refers to an increasing interest in news about one's local area including reports on weather and crime; on one's city of residence (local government election in Perm), one's university and news related to student life (the cost of student pass in Perm, photos of peer students); one's former school friends (a student in Philadelphia described in her diary as a piece of news received via Facebook the fact that a girl from her school year was engaged to a marine who also attended her school). By comparison, Perm students were most interested in their local city and regional news. A number of them commented that they started their day by looking at the local Perm news aggregators. The preferred news content came from groups focused upon the city of Perm: Perm Aktivnaya (Perm Active), Moi gorod Perm (My City of Perm), Perm Online and Perm VKontakte (Perm in Contact). Regional allegiances were confirmed by the two students who regularly consumed news from their native towns of Krasnokamsk and Gubakha, both located in Perm region. Overall news consumption in Perm was grouped as following: city news took the lead position with 22%; federal Russian news was consumed by 18% and global news by 14% of Perm students. When discussed in focus groups, there was a full spectrum of those whose consumption of local news was only 10% of their overall news ration and where the ratio of the local and regional news was 70%. When asked why they chose local and regional news over other types, students pointed to the impact factor on their daily lives, for example, the increased cost of public transport for students. However, others responded to this by saying that the impact of the federal news is also significant, especially in the field of legislation (this observation was made by a politics student who is interested in this sphere for professional reasons). In Birmingham, which is comparable in size and status to Perm, students did not express much interest in regional news. This could be explained by the fact that the proportion of international students was higher among respondents in Birmingham than in Perm, which reflected the overall intake of students in both universities. The University of Birmingham is an international institution: 'With over 5,000 international students from more than 150 countries, and 31% of our academic staff from overseas, our campus is truly diverse', as stated on the University website.⁸ Although we could not find an official figure showing the number of international students in Perm, we did not have any international students among our respondents, whose groups were characteristic of Perm students overall. A greater interest in regional and local news in Perm could further be explained by the fact that the majority of students came from the Perm region (students tend to go to university in their hometown) or neighbouring regions, and, additionally, that some of them were majoring in local government.

What is news for millennials?

In the mass media era, the news as a genre was defined by mass media outlets, which produced and distributed news one-to-many. In the new media age, news consumers have more sources of information which they can access for news. One of the effects of churnalism has been the flooding of the new media landscape with information. Millennials are learning to navigate this landscape and in order to do so, they must first actively engage with news sources. Consequently, what millennials identify as news is

⁸ <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/international/index.aspx>

no longer determined by mass media companies. They either actively search for news or bump into news, or what they consider to be newsworthy. It is the consumers who now decide which headline or Facebook posting to consider a news item. Our study is the first of its kind in that we turned to our respondents to discover what news is for them, how they identify news items and why it is news. The purpose of this study is to redefine news from the consumer's perspective. As one trilingual 20 year old student in Philadelphia put it: "News to me is anything that increases my knowledge of anything, be it research or people's interactions."

Our findings have identified several shifts in students' definition of news. All of them show that the boundaries of what can be considered a news item have broadened. First, news has become more personal in two regards: news relates to the user's own life and stories about the personal life of others including celebrities. Second, students define as news any new knowledge related to their future professional specialisation or their current subjects of study including new educational materials. Third, pop culture and off-beat news is regularly featured in students' news items, including celebrity news, trailers of newly released films, new product promotion. Both the results of our news diaries and focus groups indicate that users now identify the news genre as being greatly different to the genre of news traditionally framed by legacy media. New media with its technological advancements and wide distribution or churnalism of news has altered the news landscape to such an extent that users, who are now accustomed to see news emerge from a variety of new media sources, have now started to identify content as news that has little relation to the 'news' we consumed just a few years ago.

What is remarkable about our findings is not only the media components of the new news genre but its contents. If soft news has previously been confined to the lowest rung of the journalistic hierarchy through its contamination by its proximity to the market, in other words, its ability to attract advertisers, the dominance of social media as news distributor has destabilised this hierarchy. Online, hard news is less popular and soft news dominates news feeds. While traditional newspapers always contained both hard and soft news, the one financing and allowing for the other, the discursive containment implied by this subgenre division is now challenged by users' online habits. Pop culture and off-beat news constitutes a great part of news overall. For example, stories identified by students at the American University of Paris as news were dominated by pop culture (celebrities, fashion, make-up), news in brief or offbeat news (man meets bear, tiger on the loose, health), sport and finally international and national news articles. While these items might enter into the category of soft news, our respondents further identified as news: recipes, classroom discussion, phone calls, personal photographs, music videos. Such 'news' clearly enters the category of 'what's new?' rather than 'what is the news?' However, the nature of the reciprocity embedded into social media platform affordances means that what's new comes to be identified as 'news'. In a similar fashion, a microblogging site such as Twitter asks 'what's happening?' Consequently users classify as 'news' updates of all kinds, including news about friends and public figures users choose to follow.

As indicated by the findings of our news diaries, most news items came in blended or 'hybrid' (Jamieson and Campbell, 1982) genres; in other words, news items accessed by the students combined characteristics of several familiar genres, such as a Tweet with a link to a picture, a video, or to an opinion piece. Jamieson and Campbell (1982) call these "'rhetorical hybrids,' a metaphor intended to emphasize the productive but transitory character of these combinations" (p. 147). According to our results, this greater variety of new blended genres characterised the news genres

identified users. Of the new hybrid news genres, which are based on new interactions with information, students noted 'streaming' (referring to a continuous flow of video information updates) and 'online chat' via blogs or chatrooms. In the form of online interactions, we observe a diluted form of citizen journalism at work: while the students are not prosumers or produsers in the conventional sense (they are not creating content), they are nevertheless exploiting new media affordances to personally verify the sources and accuracy of the news they consume.

In the [Uses and Gratifications theory](#) of media users' habits, there is room to consider how users are actively coming to define as 'news' information that they perceive to be personally relevant or useful to them. In his address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 2005, Rupert Murdoch claimed: ""What is happening is, in short, a revolution in the way young people are accessing news. They don't want to rely on the morning paper for their up-to-date information. They don't want to rely on a God-like figure from above to tell them what's important. And to carry the religion analogy a bit further, they certainly don't want news presented as gospel." He continued: "Instead, they want their news on demand, when it works for them. They want control over their media, instead of being controlled by it. They want news on demand, continuously updated. They want a point of view about not just what happened, but why it happened. They want news that speaks to them personally, that affects their lives." But in 2005 Murdoch could not predict the ways in which personal news would come to define what constitutes news for online users. In the words of one respondent: "The most useful news for me is the university events post which has news that is most relevant to me." (Female, 19 years old, trilingual first year student.) In our own classification of news interests as determined by our respondents, we see in order of preference: personal news ("I saw a wedding picture of my sister on Facebook and I liked it"); local news ("my friend told me about a café in town, I am going to check it out"); hyperlocal (around the university campus); national; entertainment and celebrities; international; fashion; sport; food; social issues; art and culture; business and economics; crime; education; environment; health; traffic and weather. Patterns of consumption revealed by the news diaries allowed us to identify different types of news consumer: the 'scanners' scrolled through their Facebook or website page without clicking on links; 'diggers' actively clicked on links and pursued developing stories; 'identity-tailors' consciously prioritized certain news in such a way that their news feed created a particular portrait for other users (of political bent or for professional purposes); while 'specialists' focused on a particular type of news such as fashion or sport.

If mass media journalism is a broad practice that encompasses both hard and soft news from political reporting and in-depth investigations to lifestyle, health, entertainment, traffic reports and sports, soft news is often perceived by the industry as being utilitarian – as being of some positive use to the individual consumer. Traditional generic hierarchies are maintained by the industry both to keep journalism free from control or intervention, and to demarcate the work of members of the profession from the products and practices of non-members. Traditionally, news was a product created and distributed by professionals. Today's many-to-many social media users have destabilized these generic hierarchies and extended the definition of utilitarian soft news to incorporate news that has relevance on a hyperlocal or personal level. The traditional news genre determined newsworthiness based on an event's expected consequence for a proportionately large audience but today's users identify news based on an increasing segregation of personal and professional interests. These interests are

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guaranteed greater exposure in the users' news feeds by the algorithms which determine a news content hierarchy based on family and friends' likes and interests. Here we see new genres emerging from a system of reciprocity that is organizing users' consumption of the news. News is no longer a product but a process brought about through recurrent and repetitive social actions that are seeing the emergence of new news genres: genres which are allowed for by the affordances of new technology and correspond to the need articulated by users.

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